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PARIS FOR ARS (DWINTON)
DEPARTMENT FOR AF/PD (ANYASO, TITUS, LISENBY), AF/W (ACOOK)

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [KIRC](#) [OEJC](#) [OIIP](#) [KPAO](#) [SCUL](#) [BN](#)

SUBJECT: BENIN: GPRA Report - DVC Program on the topic "Black Americans/Black Africans: What Are the Commonalities Beyond Race"

¶1. DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY: As part of the activities scheduled to celebrate Black History Month, the Public Diplomacy Section of the American Cultural Center in Benin hosted a DVC program in its conference room. In her opening remarks, PAO Rhonda J. Watson explained the history of Black History Month and briefed the participants about the purpose and the format of the program.

¶2. DATE OF ACTIVITY: February 20; Second quarter, FY 09.

¶3. PROGRAM JUSTIFICATION/OBJECTIVES: Because of interest in the plight and achievements of African Americans and interest in reconciling the breach caused by the slave trade, Post took the opportunity of Black History Month to participate in this activity and to examine what Black Americans and Black Africans still have in common, after many centuries of separation caused by slavery.

¶4. MPP UMBRELLA THEMES AND AUDIENCE REACHED: Promotion of Democracy and Mutual Understanding: This program attracted fifteen eminent personalities belonging to a group called "Ambassadeurs de la Renaissance Africaine" (Ambassadors of the African Renaissance), including former Ministers, retired civil servants, Journalists, Businesswomen, an Islamist, a former President of the National Electoral Committee and a retired Diplomat from Haiti.

¶5. RESULT/IMPACT: Excellent. The DVC provided the participants with the opportunity to listen to a Speaker who is an African American, his experience and the problems he faces when he visits Africa, the land of his ancestors. This program served as a forum for a sincere dialogue between an African American and Beninese nationals. The speaker indicated that his year-long trip in Africa helped him to see similarities between himself and Africans, but he realized that he was also different in so many ways and he felt that he was truly American, after all. After listening to the Speaker's presentation, the participants felt disappointed about his assessment and found no reason why a Black American could not feel comfortable when he visits Africa. In referring to the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States of America, the participants explained that Black Americans and Black Africans have so many things in common, including race, culture, civilization, and most especially their capability to reach the same level of performance as the white man. Our guests were glad to have been offered the opportunity to speak from the depths of their heart to an African American brother, whom they said they will be happy to welcome any time he visits Africa again.

Another successful aspect of this program was the active participation of the Ambassadors of the African Renaissance, an NGO currently working on a long-term project intended to repatriate the souls of all victims of the slave trade. They have acquired land between Benin and Nigeria called the Igbale Aiye city to do this. In the name of the African 2010 Project, they intend to erect a monument to the Dead of the Deported ones of the odious system of slavery and will work to promote universal reconciliation and the renaissance of Africa.

¶6. NON-USG SOURCES OF IN-COUNTRY FUNDING/IN KIND SUPPORT: None.

¶7. QUALITY OF USG SUPPORT: Excellent. Speaker Eddy Harris' presentation was accurate and right to the point. Kudos to ARS Paris and its staff for recruiting such a knowledgeable speaker to address this vital topic. The speaker's fluency in French and his African experience contributed to the outstanding success of this program. Post is highly appreciative of Paris technical diligence in restoring the DVC line connection following a power failure in Cotonou.

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